(b) whether it is also a fact that Government propose to review the National Water Policy;

(c) if so, the details of areas which Government are thinking to review; and

(d) what are the reasons for such a review?

THE MINISTER OF WATER RESOURCES (SHRI PRIYARANJAN DASMUNSI): (a) The Common Minimum Programme of the Government envisages comprehensive assessment of the feasibility of the linking of the rivers of the country in a fully consultative manner.

(b) to (d) The National Water Policy provides for periodical revision as and when need arises. The Government may, if required, consider revising the National Water Policy in view of the Common Minimum Programme.

Exploration of oil and gas in Bihar

†*107. PROF. RAM DEO BHANDARY: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether drilling and other exploration works have been undertaken to find out petroleum and natural gas in Bihar;

(b) if so, the details and results thereof; and

(c) the details of future plans in this direction?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) to (c) The exploration efforts in the State of Bihar were intiated by Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd. (ONGC) in 1961. Till date, ONGC has acquired 17,595 stations of Gravity-Magnetic Data, 6,566 Ground Line Kilometers (GLK) of 2-D seismic Data. The first exploratory well, Raxaul-1 was drilled by ONGC in 1963. Thereafter, 5 more exploratory wells were drilled by ONGC in the State of Bihar. All the drilled wells were found to be devoid of hydrocarbons.

In 1997-98, Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH) had carried out 35 GLK of 2-D seismic data in the State of Bihar to upgrade geological data. Thereafter, 1,135 GLK of 2-D seismic data was acquired by DGH in 2002-03. On the basis of these surveys and the exploration work carried

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

out earlier by ONGC, one exploration block namely, GV-ONN-2002/1 was offered under the fourth round of the New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP). A Production Sharing Contract (PSC) was signed on 6th February, 2004 with a consortium of Cairn Petroleum India Ltd. and Cairn Energy Search Ltd., both of which are subsidiaries of Cairn Energy Plc., U.K. As regards future exploration work programme in this block, acquisition of 500 GLK 2-D seismic data and drilling of one exploratory well has been committed under the PSC.

Introduction of VAT

†*108. SHRI MOTILAL VORA:
SHRI ABU ASIM AZMI:

Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are considering to introduce VAT (Value Added Tax) in place of professional tax or sales tax;

(b) if so, the detailed outline thereof;

(c) whether Government have constituted a Committee of Finance Ministers of States to review the said tax;

(d) if so, the recommendations of the said Committee;

(e) whether he is aware of the fact that a number of State Governments have registered protest against the said Value Added Tax; and

(f) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): (a) to (f) VAT is a State subject. On the recommendations of the Conference of Chief Ministers held in June, 2000, an Empowered Committee of State Finance Ministers was constituted by the Government of India to deliberate, *inter alia*, on matters relating to implementation of VAT by States/UTs.

At the meeting of the Empowered Committee of State Finance Ministers held on June 18, 2004, to which I was invited, there was broad consensus among States to implement VAT with effect from 1st April, 2005. However, Uttar Pradesh expressed some reservations in implementing VAT in that State with effect from 1st April, 2005.

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.